

Hagar, My Friend

Genesis 21

The “D” List

Disgusted, 21:9

Discussed, 21:10

Distressed, 21:11

Directed, 21:12-13

Discarded, 21:14

Divorced, 21:14

Dishheartened, 21:14 (wandered)

Despondent, 21:15-16

“Do not be afraid, for I”, 21:17-18

Discovery, 21:19

Destiny, 21:20

Know Me,
Jesus,
in your suffering.

But I think you will be surprised at what you find. I'm no longer the cute little baby in the manger; no longer the teacher in the fields of Israel; no longer the pulverized pulp of a man on the cross. I am the Risen One, glorious now, full of strength and completely unafraid. I have conquered death, conquered sin, and conquered Satan. I am full of love for you. I know your suffering. I know what it is to suffer, to not have options, to be in tears in prayer, to be so upset that I actually sweat blood as I prayed to My Father. In fact, while I was on earth, I was, as Isaiah put it, a...

Man of sorrows, Isaiah 53:3
Familiar with suffering, Isaiah 53:3
Despised, Isaiah 53:3
Marred, Isaiah 52:14
Rejected by men, Isaiah 53:3
Acquainted with grief, Isaiah 53:3
Not esteemed, Isaiah 53:3
Oppressed, Isaiah 53:7
Afflicted, Isaiah 53:7
Misjudged by the law, Isaiah 53:8
Childless, no heirs, Isaiah 53:8
God has put Him to grief, Isaiah 53:10
Numbered with transgressors, Isaiah 53:12
Not especially handsome or physically admired, Isaiah 53:2
Physical violence committed against Him, Psalm 22, Gospel accounts

Does this shock you? Let it seep into your heart, Child, for I **know** what it means to suffer. And do you think I just became meek for the cross? No, My Father arranged the circumstances of my life so that I would be well-practiced in meekness and wisdom by the time the test--the choice--of the cross came.

I know your suffering. I will not leave you in your pain. Give your pain to Me and I will use it for your eternal good. You will never be the same, but trust Me--I will recreate you as a potter recreates a clay item on his wheel, and I will make you beautiful.

Welcome, friend, to this little book. I'm sorry for your circumstances, but I trust that God will help you understand a bigger picture in time. Why has He chosen to allow you to suffer? In one way, I don't know. He's mysterious and wild. You and I are just people--how can we know such things? On the other hand, I do know. He has a purpose, whether or not it has been revealed to you, for your suffering. He will give you times of suffering in your life; suffering comes and goes. During those times, you have a choice: will you trust God in your pain? Will you allow Him to do marvelous things with you in your distress? Will you draw near to Him, even though He is allowing this to happen to you? Will you trust Him with other people involved?

In her book The Hiding Place, author Corrie Ten Boom and the other women in a prison camp were paraded around naked, "inspected" by the Nazi Police. She despised this experience and felt humiliated. She realizes that Jesus, on the cross, was naked, and she made a connection to Him. She was suffering as He did! She humbly says, "...and I never even thanked Him for it."

Connect with Jesus in your suffering!

You saw the list; Jesus suffered. He suffered on every level. Relate your pain to His experience. His suffering was far more than physical, although His physical pain, especially as shown in the movie **The Passion**, was beyond anything most people have to bear. Yet many do suffer as He did: limited options, at the mercy of others, among people of brutality and power as one who is despised. His best friends ran or cowered. His mother witnessed the entire drama, and Jesus transferred responsibility for her life to His dearest friend, even as He hung on the cross by nails. He was poor. He was unmarried and childless in a culture that considered that aberrant.

Do you connect with any of this? Do you feel you are at the mercy of another person, a former loved one who has turned against you, or a person in power like a lawyer or judge? Has someone harmed you physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually? Has someone betrayed you? Are you alarmed as people near you suffer because of your suffering, as Jesus' mother did? Is the culture looking at you like you are odd?

This little book is written for you, friend, that you may have

Hope!

When I was an absolute wreck, I could not receive everything everyone told me, but I could receive Bible stories—they felt safe and I felt secure with them, stabilized by them. It seems to me that every scenario and every emotion are somewhere in Scripture, so I looked for a safe place to relate and to hear God's voice speak into my deep sadness. He introduced me to Hagar in Genesis. Do you know her? She can certainly speak to many of us today; her life, though ancient, reflects modern society.

A Bit of History~ Let me tell you a story of two women and one man...

On the stage of life picture an old man, Abram, and his wife, Sarai. They lived a moderately nomadic lifestyle in the Middle East, trying to follow God wherever He led them. To their dismay, God had **not** led them onto the adventurous property of **parenting**: they wanted a son, an heir, a boy!

Now on our stage picture this conversation between God and Abram taken from chapter 15 of Genesis:

15:3 Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." **4** The word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." **5** And God brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." **6** And Abram believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Years passed. That's so hard when you want to have a child! Have you been there? I have. After Misha, I miscarried every single pregnancy. Every one! I got to the point where I would begin to feel sick as I went up my ObGyn's stairs, overtaken with dread and familiarity and loss and sorrow and helplessness. I couldn't fix it. And neither could Abram and Sarai—but they **did** have God's promise! We know from the Scriptures that Abram believed, but Sarai...what did she think and feel?

Sarai got tired of waiting, and couldn't reason out a way that she could possibly have a child at her age! So she started thinking, trying to work out a solution in her own head, wondering, working. Had she misunderstood God? Did He really mean that **she** would bear a child? Was she supposed to fix this situation somehow? Sarai and Eve were a lot alike—but I can't condemn! I fit right in with them. "Just let me think. Let's figure this out. I'm sure we can arrive at a solution—let's be problem-solvers, not whiners! Let's be proactive, not passive! Wow, this seems workable...looks good from a lot of angles... seems sensible, so let's try this!" But there is a time to wait, dear reader—a time to wait on God and **His** solution, **His** timing. This time of waiting does not have to be passive; you can be actively focusing on other things in your life, while still waiting on God! Yet Sarai's solution set two worlds into conflict, even into this day. Read on for her decision:

Sarai and Hagar

16:1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. **2** And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. **3** So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. **4** And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. **5** And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!" **6** But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and Hagar fled from her.

That solution (Abram + Hagar) produced an heir, to be sure—but also a mess! Hagar was wrong to be ugly toward Sarai, and Sarai was wrong to blame Abraham and deal harshly with Hagar. The whole situation went from bad to worse, until Hagar had had enough. What could she do? Since she was an Egyptian, a foreigner, a servant, and treated as a non-wife, she fled. She had no contract to negotiate, no real rights to claim in that culture. She just ran. Can you imagine her thoughts?

"Get me out of this stinkin' place. I don't care about the risk, I just can't stand this any more. The wilderness is better than this! I've got to leave. How could they be this way? Well, I'm leaving, and taking my baby with me. I don't want this baby growing up with them! They'll just have to deal with it!"

Have you felt that way? Have you chosen the wilderness over routine, the unknown over the horrible, the unsafe over the miserable? So did Hagar, and look what—no, **Who**—she found.

She ran right into God's arms! **He** found **her**!

7 The angel of the Lord (most scholars agree that that phrase indicates the pre-incarnate Jesus) found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. **8** And He said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?"

He knew her name, her situation, and her location. Do you realize, dear reader, that God Himself knows **your** name, **your** situation, and **your** location? He does, and He cares! Do you really believe that? If you do, let that settle into you and bring you peace. He knows. You matter. He sees you, and He wants to be involved.

Isn't it interesting that she was by a spring, when Jesus says His followers will be filled with living water (John 7:37-39)? We've got to have water for life—it's a must, a non-negotiable. I don't know if she was heading for Shur, but it's a logical conclusion. So how did Jesus handle this situation? Did He hover? Fix it by fixing Sarai? Did He call flames of fire from heaven to consume Abram's camp? No. He's patient with **all** of us who sin, mistreat others, and do stupid things, Hagar & her antagonist included. Instead, He called her out, engaged her. He wanted a relationship, a discussion, and gave her a chance to open her heart. She cracked it open.

She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai."

She was honest, wasn't she? It was a peek into her weary, frustrated heart. She could have said a lot more, if she had been ready to open up. She could have confessed her part in the messy situation, could've blamed Sarai and Abram for their roles, could've spat and sputtered and hissed, but she kept it short and simple. I don't know about you, but if I'm mad or feel the least bit sheepish about something I am doing, I don't say as much as I normally would.

9 The angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her."

I doubt that was what Hagar wanted to hear, don't you? Hagar's dirty looks, smirks, and demeaning manner—however it was that she was contemptuous toward Sarai—would no longer be allowed by God. Hagar was to submit to her mistress. But the Angel also encouraged and challenged her mightily with these words:

10 The angel of the Lord also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude." **11** And the angel of the Lord said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has listened to your affliction. **12** He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen." **13** So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen Him who looks after me."

What does Hagar know about God after this encounter with Him? She knows He sees her, He cares, and He enters into her story, even if it's ugly. The same is true of you, dear reader: God sees you. He knows all that you've done, all that you are going through, all the good, the bad, and the ugly. And He has entered this world, this crazy life, this story, to rescue you and be your God. He cares! He knows! He sees!

This is crucial for you to know for the rest of this little book, because Hagar gets put into an even worse situation. Read on, and see if you see yourself in her life.

15 And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. **16** Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

Tension. God really knew what He was doing when He designed marriage as one man, with one woman, for life. Any time you deal with families of polygamy (I have in my travels abroad, not in the US) or multiple marriages (welcome to American culture: “how many times have **you** been married?”), one theme is carried through: **tension**. Not that one-to-one marriages do not have their share of tension, mind you! We’ve all seen it and lived it! But one-to-many almost always has tension, jealousy, frustration, and self-esteem problems. In our culture today many adults struggle in dealing with ex’s, and the situations become more and more similar to polygamy—but that’s another topic for another day. For Sarai and Hagar, I imagine their thoughts to be similar to these: “Oh, he’s in that tent with HER right now. Ugh!” “Look at them together. She’s so nasty. How could he bear to be with her?” “She is mean as a snake. I’m so much better than she is! She can’t even get pregnant. She’s a pitiful excuse for a woman!”

Years later, our story continues:

17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless, **2** that I may make My covenant between Me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” **3** Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, **4** “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. **5** No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. **6** I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. **7** And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. **8** And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

9 And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. **10** This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.

Isaac's Birth Promised

15 And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but **Sarah** shall be her name. **16** I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” **17** Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, “Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall

Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" **18** And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" **19** God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name **Isaac**. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. **20** As for **Ishmael**, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. **21** But I will establish My covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."

We read here that Ishmael has inheritance, a place in God's plan, but he is not to be the one to inherit the covenant. Sarah's son was to be given the covenant, and then pass it down to all of his children and their children. So God's original plan—a son for Sarah and Abraham—was still going to happen, regardless of Sarah's "fixing," her idea that Abraham should provide the heir through Hagar.

But now quite an explosive dynamic is set up. Two boys, one promise. Two women, one heir. And one man involved in the entire situation.

19:9 They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." **10** The Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. **11** Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. **12** So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" **13** The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' **14** Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." **15** But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh."

21:1 The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. **2** And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. **3** Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, **Isaac**. **4** And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. **5** Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. **6** And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." **7** And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

It seems to me that Sarah wanted two things: laughter and a son. It's hard to laugh when you are jealous, even envious. Jill Briscoe once told an audience that jealousy was, "I want that." Envy was, "I want that so badly, I don't want you to have it either." Sarah had lived for years now, watching Ishmael grow from infancy to toddlerhood to boyhood to around age 14, according to the verses 16:16 and 17:1. I imagine she had given up on having her own son, yet God

gave her both laughter **and** a son! He blessed this imperfect woman with incredulity, because He worked an absolute miracle.

So we come to a point in our story where dynamics are becoming more and more explosive. Sarah now has what she wants, which means Hagar and Ishmael are no longer necessary. In fact, they are expendable and unchosen now that the “true” heir has been born. I’m sure Sarah does not want anything to do with them anymore. I imagine that her negative feelings were growing stronger.

Is that how you are feeling, dear reader? Have you been considered expendable? Were you **not** chosen by your husband, the one who pledged to love you faithfully till death? You can relate to Hagar, as can I. The knot in your stomach is similar, I’m sure, to the knot in hers.

So we come to a crisis in our story, which makes me want to ask you, is that why you are reading this book? Are you in a crisis, dear one? Are you, like Hagar, facing your darkest days? Hold on...and read on. Stay with me!

Disgusted, 21:9

“The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah said that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman....”

Sarah, already adversarial, saw the teen taunting and mocking her almost three-year-old boy and reacted furiously and protectively. Probably all of us can relate—haven’t you felt those Mama Bear growls rise up in your throat?

Sarah was completely disgusted with Ishmael’s behavior and had had enough! His mocking made Sarah snap.

I know she was disgusted because of her language. Did you notice that she does not even use either Ishmael’s or Hagar’s name? She just spits out “that slave woman and her son,” and I can imagine her tone of voice was vitriolic, accusatory, and downright mean.

Has someone treated you that way, dear one? Have you been singled out, yet not acknowledged as a real human being with feelings and a past and a future? Have you ever been “*that* woman”? I have; a certain woman’s claws were out, and I was raw meat. I did not yet know how to fight for myself or let God fight for me, so I just stood there and took what she roared out. She was disgusted with me. It was an awful moment.

I went home and cried and paced. I cried out to God, asking Him why she did not see the whole story and see fault in another person who had harmed me. He firmly told me to not worry about her, her attitude, or her words; He would defend me and deal with her. She was not to be my burden. It took me a while to let go, but I did, and relief grew inside of me.

My ex-husband also tells stories of how people in our group of friends and in our church were disgusted with him. It’s so uncomfortable, dear reader, for everyone! My church did not know how to love separated, conflicted couples well; no one knew what to do or say, or NOT to do or say. It was awkward. It made distance look attractive—if I don’t go to church, I won’t have to deal with the awkwardness, the comments, the glances, the disgust of the smug.

Don’t let someone else’s disgust keep you away from God’s house, dear reader. They’re not perfect either. God will deal with them; you just run to your Father in heaven Who loves you, sees you, knows you, and longs to love you well. People’s opinions of your situation will come and go, especially if they are in a gossiping crowd, so do not let yourself be defined by them. Let God define you and make you into who He wants you to be.

A silversmith or goldsmith heats up a raw chunk of metal until the dross (impurities) separate from the pure silver or gold. This process is happening to you right now!

You are in the fire; but trust God, dear reader! He knows you; He sees you. He loves you! He will not abandon you or let the heat consume you. But He **will** let you melt. He will let you suffer for a time. He will invite you to know Him through your suffering, and through your children's suffering. He will watch over you just as the silversmith watches over his enormous cauldron.

What does the silversmith do with the impurities that come out of the lump of metal? He simply skims them off and discards them. Dear reader, when God Almighty sees your dross, He does not stand around discussing you, disgusted by your sin or lack or loss or frailty! He does not stand around condemning you for your fallacies, your misunderstanding, your selfishness, and your garbage. Instead, He skims them off, and throws them away. No over-analyzing—no condemnation. He acknowledges that the dross is there, but He does not dwell on it.

Let me give you an example of the truth found in Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

Jesus had an illuminating conversation with a woman with her own marital issues in John chapter 4. First, the Bible gives you the setting, and then their conversation begins.

6 Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. **7** A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." **8** (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) **9** The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) **10** Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." **11** The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? **12** Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." **13** Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, **14** but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." **15** The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." **17** The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; **18** for you have had five husbands, and the one you now

have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” **19** The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. **20** Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” **21** Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. **22** You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23** But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. **24** God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” **25** The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” **26** Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

Did you see the words in red? Jesus does not condemn her in righteous disgust! He simply states the truth.

Dear reader, He does the same for you. You are not blameless; no one is. But He does not treat you with the disgust He could! All of us have earned His disdain, and yet He chooses to love and heal. He acknowledges the truth about you, your situation, your family, your husband, your ex, and everything else involved; He is honest and sees clearly.

Don't run away from His honest eye; instead, run **toward** Him! He will love you and heal you more completely than any person can. Yes, go to your counselor, read this little book, talk with a few chosen, safe people, but above all, run to Jesus. He waits for you with open arms and an open heart.

Discussed

In verses 9 and 10, Sarah and Abraham discuss Hagar and Ishmael. Here's the full conversation:

“But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”

Sarah's tone was malicious, unkind, and demanding as she discussed this issue with Abraham. “Get her out of here!” In other words, “Make my problems go away, and do it **now**.” She went to her husband of several decades and put her foot down.

I hate being the topic of other people's negative conversations, don't you? In Sarah's mind, Hagar's name was synonymous with irritant, inconvenience, competition, and bitch (sorry if that word offends you—please see the heart and truth behind the word). I think mine was tossed around with that same amount of respect at certain times during my separation and divorce. Rumors began to fly, and people began to talk. Isn't it frustrating how people love to chatter about all things bad? Don't you hate gossip when you are the topic, or when it is injurious to you or someone you love?

Perhaps you, too, are being discussed by your neighbors, family, friends, church, or city. Do you want to stay home and not get out? Do you want to go grocery shopping at Wal-Mart at 5 a.m. just to avoid other people? Does going to church sound absolutely awful? Perhaps you don't want the looks: the “I-feel-so-sorry-for-her” expressions, or the “what a loser” looks, or the “what's wrong with **her**?!” stares. It's hard, isn't it? How about when you are minding your own business when a chill runs through you, and you look up, and two women quickly turn away like they weren't really saying something about you at all?

Dear friend, here's what God told me. He said, “Child, don't even worry about defending yourself. Don't take your energy to explain or rebut. Use your diminishing energy to focus your eyes on **Me**. You see, Suz, I have not left you in the midst of your pain, and I will not! I know both sides of this story—and I am not taking sides, Child: I want to take **over**.”

Learn a lesson from My servant Moses. Remember when Miriam and Aaron opposed him in Numbers 12? I heard what people were saying about Moses, My servant; even his own brother and sister were discussing him with ugly hearts. What did I do, Suz?”

I went to my Bible and read the whole story again. God called the three of them to the Tent of Meeting, and asked the two grumblers to step forward. Then **God**

Himself defended Moses! God Himself! He explained to Miriam and Aaron how He normally revealed Himself (visions & dreams), then how He revealed Himself to Moses (face to face, clearly). Numbers 12:9 says, “The anger of the LORD burned against them, and He left them.” Ouch. But the consequences did not end there: when the cloud of God’s glory lifted away, Miriam was leprous, and Aaron was left horrified and begging for forgiveness for them.

And here’s a key point, my friend: how then did Moses react to Aaron’s plea for forgiveness? Moses was moved to ask God to heal Miriam immediately! After Miriam’s time of healing and isolation, the camp moved on. Do you see any significance in this for your life?

Here’s what I think:

Don’t fret about defending yourself. God has your back, and He’s bigger than their gossip. And yes, be quick to forgive.

God knows the truth. Let that draw you to Him and give you freedom inside. His opinion of you is truly the only one that ultimately matters.

The truth comes out eventually.

Don’t bad-mouth reactively; it makes you look bad, sound bad, and (hopefully) feel bad. Don’t go for the cheap shot when you are talking about the person who hurt you. Instead, turn your anger and frustration and feelings of betrayal into an honest prayer to the God Who sees you.

Use Psalm 37 as a guide to pray through this time. Here’s an example:

Psalm 37:1-6 “Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.

Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

Delight yourself in the LORD and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him and He will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.”

“Oh God, I am so, so in need of You right now! I hate all the talk that is going on around me—it makes me feel stupid, dirty, angry, and pitiful all at the same time. Help me right now to “not fret” because of this damning talk. Help me trust You instead! Help me to keep my eyes on You—give me tunnel vision for You, because I trust that You love me. Help me to just “do good,” to do the right thing, to take the high road, to walk so closely with You that I do what You do. I know You struggled with this same thing—people always talking about You, to Your

face, and behind Your back. Help me learn from how You treated them! Keep me in Your “safe pasture,” that I may “dwell in the land” of my neighborhood and church and friends and not freak out and break down all the time. Send me friends who will love me well.

Help me to “delight in You” and Your ways. If I do that, You will give me the desires of my heart. I know You do not delight in my thoughts of revenge or bitterness. Help me with those, LORD! I cry out to You!

Your ways are paths of peace; Your ways are ways of strength and righteousness. Help me to keep my peace while confronting unrighteous things in my life and in the lives of those talking about me.

“Make my righteousness shine like the dawn,” Lord—a beautiful burst of light after a dark time. Help me be content with Your knowledge of what I’ve done well and how I’ve failed. Anything I’ve done well—righteously—is to Your credit and glory.

Help me in this messy time. I love You! Yours.”

Revisit “**never share...with my son Isaac**” with me. Do you hear bitterness and judgment in her tone? I do. This may be a default mechanism for Sarah. In her protectiveness, in her frustration, she may default to the setting of bitter judgment. She wants separation; at this point, she may even want extinction! No more Hagar, no more Ishmael; no competition, no brotherhood, no sense of “family.”

She comes across to me as having the attitude that her son Isaac is better than Ishmael now. That’s a hard sentiment for Hagar to bear. Factor in that Hagar had no real rights and that Sarah had the power in this situation, and you’ve got a massive conflict boiling up and ready to explode, with harmful consequences flying through the air like hot boulders and lava spewing out of a volcanic mountain. And they all seemed aimed at Hagar and Ishmael.

Read on...because Abraham feels the heat too.

Distressed, verse 11

“The matter distressed Abraham greatly, because it concerned his son. But God said to him, don’t be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant.”

How are you responding to the conflict in your life right now?

Abraham, in the middle of this mess, responded with **distress**—great pain, inner turmoil. It’s tough when we, as adults, go through something that causes us pain; but add in our children, and oh! The pain multiplies exponentially. God alone could give Abraham the direction he needed at a time like this.

Perhaps you are in this same spot: deeply distressed. You don’t know what to do about your situation, your children, your job, your insurance, your bills, your house, your pets, your time, or your feelings. Most people say they understand but they don’t; some people are getting tired of hearing about your problems; and others just are not going to have the answers for you that you need.

So what do you do when you are distressed? Where do you turn?

How do you hear God’s voice?

One of the women in the Back Porch Bible Study I attend nailed a modern-day dilemma: “Do you go to the **throne** or to the **phone**?” I thought that was great for many of us. Do you start texting, tweeting, emailing, calling? It’s easy, isn’t it? But what is **easy** isn’t always **best**.

I think what’s **best** is for us to call on God, pour out our hearts to Him, and then wait for His reply with an obedient mindset.

What is this like? Join me as I open a private door into my life, and read through one time when I wrote as I called on God.

Oh God, it’s hard for me to even put into words right now how much I need You and Your grace and Your peace and Your comfort. I’m a wreck—an absolute wreck! I don’t want to eat. I’m angry and fired up one minute, and dissolving into tears the next. I need grace, Father God, and I need help! I need You to help me parent M as I go through this upheaval. I’m exhausted and need inner rest badly. You have been so good to me, Lord. I need You to come down into my life and create a revolution! Change me, fix me, heal me, mold me, straighten me up, hold me, love me, deal with my sin! Wear me out, break me down, and build me back into the woman You want me to be. You are the only One I trust. And I’m even scared of You right now—I had such a wrong idea that You “would never let me fall.” Ha. Try, FALL AND SHATTER INTO A MILLION PIECES. I need You to gather the pieces, Lord. Gather me up into Your arms. Remake me. Help. Your child, Suz

That's what "crying out to God" means to me—honestly letting Him into me. Now, what about "hearing His Voice," waiting on His reply with an obedient mindset?

The easiest way I know how to hear God is to read the Bible. Know what He says in there so the Holy Spirit can speak it back to your spirit and mind. For example, if I was being tempted to lose my temper, I would "hear" scriptures inside my mind about **not** losing my temper, such as Proverbs 15:1: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." If I was exhausted, I would hear, "The joy of the Lord is your strength," from Nehemiah 8:10, or verses about sleep. If I was being tempted to speak negatively about M's dad or family, or whine, or just grouse about my situation, across the visual screen in my head would roll, "When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent," from Proverbs 10:19. Proverbs 10:32 helped me too: "The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse." These verses were like ammunition, bullets and bombs exploding in my head and spirit to help me blow up the sinful and ugly yuck I was trying to fight so hard! If a verse came to mind, I knew it was one the Holy Spirit had chosen to give me for the moment; that is His job, according to John 14:25. "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

Another way I hear God is through songs. Kari Jobe's music has been instrumental in bringing me to the throne of God. When I'm there, I'm safe. I put together a CD of favorite songs of comfort, songs of peace, songs of hope, and songs of healing, and that helped me almost as much as Scripture! Twila Paris' "Fix Your Eyes" did absolute wonders within me. "I will hide my soul in Jesus! I will rest my heart in Him. When the storms of life rush over me, I will not let them in. There will be no pain in heaven, but for now, and until then, I will hide my soul in Jesus." That chorus sung by Avalon ("Hide my Soul") got me through many, many difficult years. As I pulled out of sorrow, Toby Mac's "Ignition" became my theme song. "Holy God" by Brian Doerksen is beautifully sung by our choir at church, and makes me want to jump out of my seat. "Hungry" by Joy Williams... "Hallelujah" by Heather Williams... the list could go on and on, old hymns, old songs, to contemporary choruses. He speaks—and sings over me (Zephaniah 3:17), so it's no wonder that I draw near to Him in song.

Every morning—every single morning, at this phase in my life—I wake up with a song playing in my mind. It moves my spirit as I awaken, and draws me to God—**if I am listening**. I get rolling, going, doing, quickly. Can you relate? Kids up, fed, out the door to school. Work, meetings, obligations, people. Events, sports, running the roads, carpools. Health, news, books, dinner, grocery. It adds up and comes on strong in my world. My mind can switch gears all too quickly from the sweet song playing in my head as I surface from sleep to worry and hurry. One way I've found to be effective to help myself remember my song of the day is to

write it on my bathroom mirror with a dry-erase marker, and on a note to myself. I've never written them on my calendar or in my phone, but that's a thought too. He sings over you, my friend—listen to the words of His song for you.

I hear God's voice in the wise counsel of my friends and family, too. I call a meeting, I pursue their advice, or I spontaneously ask a trustworthy person God brings to me. I went to counseling for a while during our separation and divorce, which I thought was amazing! A big **thank you** to Mack and Marla and my neighbors and all the counselors out there who strengthen those of us who are weak and struggling and sad and confused. 😊

Lastly, I hear God's voice through the intimate whispers of the Holy Spirit. What does He say? He is consistent with Scripture, never going against anything the Bible says to be true. He is consistent with the character of God. He gives me counsel that is obviously wise, and would never have thought of myself. He whispers—it's a speaking, yet not, a Voice, yet not audible to my ear. It's a knowing, but from the inside out. His counsel is more specific than conscience, and more powerful. He can advise on everything from how to order my day, what to wear, and what I need at the grocery, to how to manage money, how to confront or serve my ex, and how to stand my ground in a custody issue. He can be the One to help you be humble, to quiet your fears, and to speak peace in a time of family war. He can train you for battle, strengthen your dusty frame, and put vigor in your voice again.

I think it's very important to wait on God with an obedient mindset, as Abraham usually did, because God is God, and we are not. He is trustworthy, even when you are in pain—**especially** when you are in pain! You cannot always trust your own judgment, so lean on Him. Proverbs 3:5,6 recommends that we “trust in the Lord with all your heart; lean not on your own understanding.” If God tells you to stay in your home, stay in your home. If He tells you to stay away from certain people, do it. Obey Him. If He says to love your estranged spouse, love him well, in God's way. If He says watch a certain movie, do it; there's a lesson in it for you. If He says read a certain book, don't wait, don't put it off. Whatever He says—do; there's life in it for you!

Directed, verses 12 and 13

“Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your descendants will come. I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring.”

Abraham received direction from God about this awkward, frustrating situation. What exactly happened here in this word from God?

God affirmed that Abraham could listen to what Sarah was saying. God was telling Abraham to listen to his wife, that she needed to be heard. Was he saying that Sarah’s attitude was good? No. That Abraham should feel the same way as Sarah? No. But He did say to listen to her and heed what she was saying.

God affirmed that His blessing would go through Isaac.

God affirmed that Ishmael would also be blessed. This blessing would mirror Isaac’s blessing of numbers: both boys would become “nations.” Both boys would have large families and become a group of force, material, and identity. In this sentence, though, God indicates the truth of Jeremiah 29:11: Ishmael would have “a future and a hope, plans to prosper you [him] and not to harm you [him].” God would not just let Ishmael fall off the radar; God would take this child—similar, I think, to many step-children of today—and bless him.

My thoughts on this may be a bit non-literal, so let me prepare you for them. I really think that God was saying that He would be God over the whole mess, and work His good out for everyone involved. I think He was intentionally, verbally taking ownership and Lordship over the situation by saying these three things to Abraham.

*I think He was saying, Look, Abraham, I know what Sarah thinks and feels. I’m not pushed, shoved, or intimidated by Sarah. She hates Hagar and wants Ishmael out, gone, a non-issue. She’s threatened and angry and fed up. I know this. But you, Abraham, son of Mine, know **this**: she does not control or manipulate My sovereign, loving will for Ishmael. I, and I only, am Lord of this boy’s future. If she says he must go, that’s okay. I will work out My plan for Ishmael regardless of what Sarah feels. I love him; do not be afraid for him.*

Friend, do you need to hear that for yourself? Other people can be loud and pushy in their anger; demanding, intimidating, overwhelming. But, dear one, God is not intimidated! God is not pushed around! He has a plan for you and your children and your step-children that includes His love and faithfulness. We need to turn to Him, seek after Him, and teach our children and step-children to do the same, so we can walk with Him into whatever He has for us.

Discarded, verse 14

“Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He placed them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy.

This part makes me so mad! I want to shake Abraham and say, “What were you thinking? Are you kidding me?!?”

Today we have divorce lawyers, court systems, financial formulas, co-parenting classes, and the like to ensure that no one gets ripped off, mistreated, or underserved. Hagar had no such recourse.

When most Christians think of Abraham, they do not think of this point in time as one of his shining moments. I certainly don't. Here he was—wealthy, God's man, obedient (Isaac offered up on the mountain later in his life), talked with God, a forefather, had the covenant with God, many servants, capable—and what did he give Hagar?

Where was the donkey to carry the loads of food for their long journey to a settlement?

Where was the other donkey for one of them to ride when they got weary?

Where was the large, caring amount of water, as they departed into the wilderness?

Where was the bounty of food to get them started on a new life?

Where was the plan for how he would check on Ishmael's progress as a man?

Where was a servant to help tend his son?

Where was a compass or a map for them to use to find shelter or a settlement?

Where was his witness as a man of God?

Instead, Hagar was the pack-mule, for scanty supplies, no less! Perhaps they would live on that water for a day, maybe two. I can't imagine carrying one-two days' worth of water on my shoulders, can you? And throw some food into a bag and put that on your back too! Forget the other clothes, the deodorant, the toothpaste, and the bedroll—no room on your back to carry those! Forget the few trinkets you might have had for yourself. Forget Ishmael's belongings. Forget it all—it's time to leave, now, and that's it.

Did Abraham pray over them as they left?

What did he say to Ishmael?

How does a father send his son away? No cell phones, no telegrams, satellites to uplink, no Facebook, no Skype, no communication, period.

I do believe that Abraham had faith in God's word of blessing, and that would have been his best comfort. If God says He will make Ishmael into a nation, that implies much good for Abraham to hang on to. But what about Hagar?

In this world she had no rights or honors, not even as Ishmael's mother. She was utterly discarded. She was tossed out, not to be missed. The tension in the tents would be gone, the attention could finally rest solely on Isaac, and life would be better for Sarah. But for Hagar? Did anyone care for Hagar? Did anyone see her? Did anyone know how this treatment affected her, scarred her, scared her?

Is this how you feel, my friend? Do you feel discarded? Have you been tossed out, not cared for? Has the only attention given to you been negative, and so people are glad to have you gone? You are not alone!

In your divorce, separation, or mediation, did you get nothing, or get shafted? You are not alone!

Is your child suffering because of an adult situation? Does this cause you deep pain? You are not alone!

Throughout the ages, women like Hagar—possibly like you—have survived this scenario. Do not give up! Do not let go of Jeremiah 29:11: God has "a future and a hope for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you." Pursue Him with what energy you have left, and watch Him work in your life and in your children's lives. But hold on, friend—it may get worse before it gets better. That's how it was for Hagar. Read on.

Divorced, verse 14

“Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He placed them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba.”

What did it take to divorce someone in Abraham and Hagar’s day? Obviously not much! Hundreds of years later, Moses had a writ of divorce put in place; Jesus stressed that it was “due to the hardness of your hearts” that the writ accommodated divorce. A piece of paper...and Boom, your life was completely changed.

Perhaps Hagar, as a servant and Egyptian, expected nothing more than a quick divorce, nothing more than being left alone. Her status—low—dictated that her expectations be the same—low. Abraham certainly did not go out of his way to care for her needs or Ishmael’s. He just gave them those provisions and told them to leave.

Did that happen to you?

A piece of paper, and Boom, your life was changed forever? No more identity as “his wife.” No more comfort zone in certain circles of friends or society. No, you were told to leave. “His” friends would side with him (yes, they sometimes choose sides), and you were no longer welcome. And what about church? Were you welcome, or did you feel pressure to leave? Did you want to never go to church again because of how the situation played out?

Divorce is all about division, and personally, I hate division.

No longer one, but now two—and two in a bad situation! Or maybe, like Hagar, **you** are the one in the bad situation, and your significant other sure does seem fine and dandy. In fact, with your departure, you notice, his life seems like it will be better. Ouch. A hot knife just pierced your soul.

It didn’t start out this way, did it? You began with dreams and beauty. So did I—ideals, images in my head of growing old and having lots of babies and rocking on a big porch and doing missionary work together and lots of family all around.

I like unity,
I like the concept of being a team,
I like knowing there are people with me,
I like having a partner,
I like knowing someone has my back.
I like investing myself into other people.
I like togetherness,
 friendship,
 love, and
 snuggling.

I like love, laughter, closeness.

Divorce undoes all that closeness.

Divorce divides.

The team goes separate ways,

the people leave you and you leave them,

the partnership is dissolved,

your back is exposed,

your investment does not return in the way you

thought.

No togetherness;

instead, enmity or lack of trust,

brokenness,

aloneness.

You become a survivor instead of a spouse.

You become **that** woman instead of **the** woman.

You lost in love, the greatest investment of a woman's heart.

The balloons that seemed to lift you off your feet at your wedding now lie shredded at your feet.

It can seem so overwhelming, so depressing.

Where did that dream go, that mental picture of beauty and oneness and prosperity? Where did your partner go, full of promise and faith and hope and love and strength?

Why did all this happen?

Why did all this happen to me?

Disheartened, verse 14 (wandered)

“She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba.”

Hagar wandered in the desert...
...and so did I.

My desert was sorrow,
sadness,
poetry,
anger,
waiting,
praying,
hoping,
seeking God,
seeking counsel,
seeking love from my parents and family and friends.

My desert was division,
single parenting without bitterness,
finding time to weep and feel anger apart from my child,
grieving my own sin and my own failures,
drinking deeply the bitter-tasting cup of loss.

My desert felt endless.

My desert included 2 years of separation that ended suddenly with the revelation of foul play.

My desert included being the one to contact a lawyer,
parking in the paying lot,
putting money into the slot,
opening the door to the building,
finding the lawyer's name on the directory,
pressing the elevator button,
getting into the elevator (it felt like a coffin),
pressing the button (my hands were shaking),
finding his office door,
waiting in the waiting room,
and always,
always, fighting back the tears.

My desert included a daughter, age five when he left. (Well, more accurately, I asked him to make a choice, and he left.)

My desert included the tension between fear and faith.
Fear about work, money, future, children, loss;

Fear that God had allowed us, His own beings with free will, to move so
far away
from what He loved.

Fear, because He did not rescue me as I thought He would.
Fear that I could not forgive this man; or myself.

But there was faith, too--

Faith that God would see me through,
that He would heal me,
that He would not leave me.

Faith that my family would always stand with me.

Faith that his family would never stand with me (had they ever?).

Faith that I would love again. I was made to love; I knew that.

The desert is a place of extremes—hot during the day, cold at night. Have you
felt your own edges, your own extremes? I did.

The desert is a place of barrenness. Did you feel stripped, barren, undecorated,
bleak? I did. I think Hagar did too.

The desert is a place of adaptations. If you don't have adaptations like thick,
spiny, cactus skin, ways to conserve energy, and the ability to deal with
temperature changes, you will die. I did not have thick skin at all. At all! I could
conserve money, no problem, but I had more trouble conserving energy. I would
fold quickly, using up my energy to survive, love M, and deal with whatever
emotional turbulence was "on" for the day. Then I would crash and burn. And
temperature changes? I had to learn about that one. When my ex was cold or
white-hot angry, I had to learn some survival skills. Many of those came in the
desert.

Hagar **wandered** in the desert, did you notice?

When you are hit with such a blow as divorce, you lose a sense of balance, of
direction, of focus. You may reel. I did. I think I reeled, fell, rolled, and crashed!
Wandering implies this sense of loss. You feel so deeply, so hurt, that you often
just wander for a while. You may feel aimless. It's amazing that you even take a
step.

For some people, this process goes on for years, even decades. The loss is so
deep, the pain taken so to heart, that the person copes by checking out of parts
of life. I met one man who had been so wounded that he became a drug user for
about a decade, staying just numb enough not to succumb to the tragedy of his
pain. I have met women who will not—for one second!—slow down, because if
they do, they will feel their pain. So their lives look productive, "together," and
focused, but really, they are chased by the demon of pain.

I have met women who live in the past, tears today as fresh as they were years ago, because they are **still** in the wilderness. They ask **wilderness questions**:
Why wasn't I enough?
What did I do wrong?
Why didn't he love **me**? Why didn't he choose our **children**?
How could he have left like that?
How could I have been such an idiot?
Who was I then? I don't even know that person.
How could I have treated him that way?
Why didn't I realize I was throwing everything away?
Why?

I call these **wilderness questions** because they leave us wandering in circles until they are resolved. We turn this way and that, and they buffet us with painful blows of our inadequacies and lack.

Often, these wilderness questions send us to the counselor or to the sedative. We seek answers, but facing the pain inside these answers can be devastating. We are not as beautiful within as we thought. We really did hurt him. We really were repulsive then. We really did do harm. We are not in control.

He really did choose someone else for his own reasons. He really did want to leave. He chose her over me. He chose anything, anyone over me! He just wanted to get away...from me. Why? I had to go there, face these questions.

We really are screwed up. Our mouths are not kind, our hearts get hard, our God did not do what we thought He was supposed to: He allowed this pain. So can I trust Him again? What else do I not understand about Him that I thought I did understand before this suffering? Is He going to allow me to be hurt even more?

I learned all kinds of things about myself as I wandered in my desert. I didn't like a lot of them. Did you know I was a lousy listener? I was an interrupter. Ugh. Talk about a way to make someone else feel small, feel annoyed, feel unvalued, and feel unappreciated!

I also learned I, like so many Christian women, made my man too important, too God-like in my life. Oh boy, that's ugly. No man, no person, can last for long in that role. We aren't made for it.

I learned that when people say, "God won't let you fall," that they just haven't fallen yet. Yes, He will let us fall—yes He will! But He doesn't leave just because we fall, and He is the first to offer His hand to help us up, and the first to offer His shoulder for a good cry.

I have learned that friends will try hard to give good advice, but the best advice comes from the Bible and the people who read it, live in it, and have been in the wilderness themselves.

I have learned that **the wilderness is worth the pain**. No drugs, no sedative—over-working, over-committing, over-achieving, over-drinking, over-talking, over-sleeping, over-medicating, over-dramatizing, over-exercising—**none of that can replace God's whisper of love in the wilderness**. Not even close! I've actually learned to look back at my wilderness wandering through the filter of a loving gaze, and I see that time now as invaluable. God gave me a bitter cup to drink and with His help I drank it. I brewed a lot of the pain in it, but not all. But the whole divorce was not just about me and my pain; it was about my ex, his "stuff," and our child.

It's funny-odd, you know—we, as Christians, ask God in our prayers,

"Oh God, help me to know You better. Be real to me. Give me great faith so that I will have expanded confidence in You. Help me to do Your work in this world."

When we pray this prayer, we rarely expect the wilderness to be the answer to our prayer! Most of us would rather learn about God in the comfort of joy and peace, rather than the crucible of fire. When He allows us to be in the wilderness, we get mad at Him. "How could You have let me get here?" "Don't You love me?" We cry, we blame. But God is there, in the wilderness, waiting for us to be stripped of everything, barren and at a loss, and then you know what He does? He's so wild. He sends His love. He whispers His love to us.

Not many people hear His whispers; I am convinced of this. You have to be still, and that can be very, very difficult, for many reasons.

But if you are still in this desert,
If you quieten yourself and listen for Him,
He will whisper to you, dear reader.

He will tell you of His love.
He will put His salve on your wounds.
He will tell you the Truth.

It will hurt, but then it will set you free.

Free indeed!

He will help you get up every day.
He will teach you how to love well.
He will give you energy to love your children.
He will help you forgive!

He will help you confess!
He will bring you life, where there once was only death.

He will give you a new song for your soul,
one that will nourish you and bring you close to Him.

He will bring you to the point where you choose to say,
Whatever You want, Lord. Whatever! I am in Your hand, ready to do
whatever You say.
I want this intimacy with You to never go away.
Thank you for this desert!
You are enough.
You have changed me, God; thank You! I am not the same.

Did Hagar have anyone to tell her about this? God's people, the ones with the
relationship with God, sent her away.

So how was she to know? The people of God were the ones who hurt her. But
God Himself took up her cause, as we will see, and spoke directly to her. Read
on.

Despondent, verses 15 and 16

When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there nearby, she began to sob.

Her supplies were gone, used up. Picture her tilting that skin of water one more time, with not even one drop coming out. Nothing. It was completely empty.

Are you there, in that empty place? Is that stash of cash gone, your comfort zone cold, your friends fickle?

Are you done? Is your hope gone? Are you sick and tired to the point where you feel you need to go numb and just get away?

Are your children hurting? Now that's enough to push anyone over the edge.

Hagar knew this pain, and was completely undone by it. She could not fix this or change this, and she was at the end of her resources.

She just had to survive at this point, and to do so, she separated herself from her child. His life was her final reason to live, and his suffering was her final source of deepest pain.

With no more son to hold, no more supplies to carry, and no more hope, she crumpled and cried, **despondent**.

I was not apathetic; I was despondent. That means hopeless, extremely unhappy, discouraged, dejected, downhearted, and blue. I did not feel, "I don't care." I felt sad: despondent. You may have felt that way, or could be feeling that way now.

The Bible is full of hope and wisdom for you at this point, my friend. Let me share with you some of the passages that meant the most to me when I was despondent.

Psalm 86:1-7,13,15-16a

Incline Your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.

Preserve my life, for I am godly. (Not my favorite part. I felt like a slug.)

Save Your servant who trusts in You—You are my God. (I was **trying** to trust.)

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for to You do I cry all the day.

Gladden the soul of Your servant, for to You, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

For You, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon You.

Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace.

In the day of my trouble I call upon You, for You answer me.

For great is Your steadfast love toward me....

You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Turn to me, and be gracious to me; give strength to Your servant....

2 Corinthians 12:9 “My grace is sufficient for you.”

The Scripture that really blew me away was **Isaiah 54**. I felt like it was written with me in mind. Here are some of the key, personal verses from that chapter:

**“Fear not, for you will not be ashamed;
be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced;
for you will forget the shame of your youth,
and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.**

For your Maker is your husband,

The LORD of Hosts is His Name.

And the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,

The God of the whole earth He is called.

**For the LORD has called you, like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit,
Like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God.**

For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you.

In overflowing anger for a moment I hid My face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the LORD, your Redeemer.

V 10: For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed,

**But My steadfast love shall not depart from you,
And my covenant of peace shall not be removed,”**

Says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

**V13: All your children will be taught by the LORD,
And great shall be the peace of your children.**

I needed those verses like I needed air!

There were days I struggled to hear God. He knew I was despondent, so you know what He did? He gave me Angie Smith. Angie wrote me a letter every day—every, every day, for months! Inside her letter was something loving and real for me: a personal note, and a Bible verse. She was the one who I called at one point and said, “I cannot pray for this man [my ex-husband]. I need you to pray for him. I know he needs it, and I am not in the right frame of mind to pray for him—I’m too angry and horrified and unspiritual. So will **you** pray?” She and Charlotte, another friend, met for **months** and prayed over Misha, Ben, and me. Their commitment was remarkable and it made an eternal difference. They moved heaven and earth!

I tried to put my hope in those verses and other Bible passages. My heart was fairly burnt out on hoping in people, and I was feeling the sting of realizing that

God had not stopped our descent into this abyss. So I tried to remember His love for me—that He sings over me, and that His motives were trustworthy, and when I had the energy, I sang and prayed and cried and thought. It took time to get through my despondency.

It's one thing to be able to care for yourself and tend to your own wounds. But Hagar also had Ishmael's woundedness, as you may have a child's woundedness to consider. I ask you, mother to mother (if you are a mother, that is): Is there any suffering that is greater than seeing your child suffer? Can any mother with a feeling heart claim any greater suffering than seeing her child suffering?

What a miserable time for Hagar—seeing her boy suffer. Perhaps you too are seeing children suffer because of this situation you are in. It's almost unbearable, isn't it? I don't know how many tears I cried over M, but I do feel like it was an ocean. That kind of pain is almost unfathomable—to ask so much of a little girl or boy...oh, it's just awful. I know M's dad didn't feel good about it either, and NOW, he's devastated still about it.

M and I have talked for dozens of hours about how separation and divorce have affected her. The ripple effect is more like the tsunami effect! I truly believe that because of Angie and Charlotte's prayers, M was not as harmed as she would have been had they not been praying. During the years of our separation and divorce, they prayed a bubble of protection over her, and God honored their prayer! As the years have gone by and M's understanding of what happened within our family has deepened, the wounds have been so painful! But that's her story to tell, when she's ready; not mine.

I have realized only God can heal such wounds—but praise Him, He is our Healer (Exodus 15:26)! I have read in Isaiah 53 that Jesus was familiar with suffering, smitten by God, afflicted, wounded, childless, crushed, despised, a Man of sorrows. He was in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane; He wept over Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Psalm 22 also details prophetically how He suffered, and it is painful to read. He was rejected too, even though He was chosen by God and precious (1 Peter 2:4).

So what do I conclude? “We do not have a High Priest [Jesus] who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses...come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).” “Cast all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). I believe that! I learned about the tender mother-love of God: Isaiah 66:13: “As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you.”

Jesus—God's very own Son—treasures the suffering and can relate in every possible way. I was so thankful to discover Jesus' Presence in my suffering, dear

reader—thankful not only with my entire life's energy to the core, but thankful because of His tender consideration of my child.

He is watching over you and over your children, dear one. He knows, He hears, He sees. He comes to us as the strongest, mightiest, most just, most powerful Person of all time, yet He gently watches over us. You can trust Him, even when your child suffers.

What else did I learn during that time? Keep communication open with your child. Never lie, but don't say too much. Never speak with disgust or venom toward your estranged partner, because your child feels like he or she is partly made of the one you are damning. In other words, if you damn their father, they feel dirty and damned too, because their father helped create them! Set an example for your children as best as you can in prayer and in kindness and in forgiveness. Then leave it up to God. Let go. Sleep. Care for them. Pray. Breathe. Life will come.

“Do not be afraid, for I”, verses 17, 18

“God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid, for God has heard the boy crying as he lies there.”

This is an astounding passage, because it includes a theophany, an interaction of the pre-incarnate Jesus with Hagar. I do not see Jesus appearing physically from these verses, but the clue to His involvement comes with the term, “the angel of God.” Scholars teach us that if the “the” is present, it signifies Jesus; if an “an” is present, it’s an angel. Look throughout Scripture, and you will see that these statements are valid. It’s Hagar’s second time to have this type of experience!

So with that background, consider this: Jesus, pre-incarnate, was even then watching over humanity, caring for people, and involved. God, too, heard the boy crying. The Godhead was not just sitting outside of the pearly gates, withdrawn and isolated, glorious spectators! We see Them as involved, able to see from heaven and able to intervene with hope.

Perhaps that’s what you need. Do you need God to lean down from heaven and whisper hope into your ear? Do you need Jesus to whisper hope to your heart?

It can happen, dear reader. Do you believe that God has a Son, Jesus? Both are divine, yet God’s plan to rescue confused, mean, sinful, selfish, egotistical, frustrating, distracted, prideful, hard, self-righteous, lost, arrogant people included Jesus’ arrival here onto earth—doesn’t sound too divine, does it? Mary was His mother, the Holy Spirit was His “Creator,” and Joseph was His (earthly) dad. Mary and Joseph did their best to raise Him well; we know little about Jesus’ childhood. We really get involved in Jesus’ life once He was about 30. He had a year of gaining momentum in ministry, then a year of popularity, then a year of tremendous challenge politically, spiritually, and socially.

All around Him He saw need. A popular term today for what He saw is “brokenness.” He saw wounded people, devastated people, outcasts; the disrespected and disrespectful, the arrogant and the humble, the loose woman and the lascivious man, the blind (from self-righteousness) religious man and the blind (from physical disability) beggar. He saw disfigured physical bodies and spirits, souls racked with pain, hearts torn and hard. Does this sound like anyone you know? Does this sound like you?

So, according to God’s plan and through the Holy Spirit’s power, Jesus became the One Who took the weight and penalty for all of the above ugliness. He intentionally took our sin—the ways we miss perfection, the ways we do harm, the ways we fall short of who God created us to be—and made it His own. He was abandoned, stripped, beaten, mocked, spit upon, harmed in every physical way; He took the worst humanity and Satan could dish out. It killed Him—but it

killed Him because He laid down His rights to His own life, and gave it up for you and for me.

You and I—and our ex's—are so much less than whom God created us to be. I've hurt others; I've made others suffer. I've mostly lived one of those "good" lives, but compared to Jesus' **truly** good life, I'm dirt. My motives are usually selfish. I can be self-centered one minute and self-sacrificing the next. I can live for hours without thinking about God or His provision and blessings on me, completely caught up in the importance of my own little world. I can have strong faith one day, and then confront a giant and completely fall apart the next. I can exude discipline and health, then crash and burn with indulgence and pride.

So what do I do? How do I live? Who can rescue me from myself, from my weaknesses, from my life?

Who could rescue Hagar from her life?

Jesus is the Answer, the One!

Just as He leaned down and **called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid, for God has heard the boy crying as he lies there,"** He leans down to you and to me and whispers so gently, "What's the matter? Do not be afraid. God has heard...." God sees and knows, and sends Jesus to give you encouragement, even today, with this little book.

He says to not be afraid. Consider this. Hagar and her son were in a hopeless situation at this point, and Jesus has the audacity to tell her to not fear. How can He say that?

Because Jesus has been through every temptation common to mankind, because He was mistreated to the extreme, because He had complete trust in His Father's radical plan to save people, **He can say "do not fear."** He's been through the worst, and trusted God through it, even death! So He is not just being pious; He is being realistic.

Look at these other "fearless" verses from the Bible. By the way, I've heard that there are 365 "do not fear" verses in the Bible. Coincidence?

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Phil. 4:6-7

He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. Job 23:10 (Remember the dross/metal/in the fire story.)

You have been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat. Is 25:4

They shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. John 10:28

Uphold me according to Your word, that I may live; and do not let me be ashamed of my hope. Psalm 119:116.

He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him. He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. Psalm 103:10,11,14

God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and a sound mind. 2 Timothy 1:7

Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude [an army], for the battle is not yours, but God's. 2 Chronicles 20:15

So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with **us** are more than those who are with **them**." And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 2 Kings 6:16-17

Do not be afraid; I am your shield. Genesis 15:1

Be strong and of good courage and do it—for the LORD God—my God—will be with you. He will not leave you or forsake you, until you have finished all the work. 1 Chronicles 28:20

Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you." But they were terrified and frightened. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled?...Behold, it is I, Myself." Luke 24:36-39

My Spirit remains among you; do not fear! Haggai 2:5

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. John 14:27

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you. Psalm 56:33

So as you can see, dear reader, God has given us many stories, examples, and verses so we can take a stand against fear. Hagar's story is one of my own favorites! Explore the context around the verses above. They will encourage you!

One last thing before we move on: do you see how personal and how involved God was? He still is, dear reader, and I really want you to hear me. **He loves you—He knows you by name, sees your situation, and has a plan of action for your life.** Put yourself in a position so that you can hear what He whispers to you. They may be words of peace, of comfort, and of confrontation. He risked everything to come to earth, get involved, and rescue us—and He takes His job very seriously!

Hagar heard God tell her to not fear, because God had heard the boy crying and had a plan of action for her. He knew she needed direction, and finally, at the end of her rope and water, she had slowed down enough to hear Him. She was miserable enough to just let go and cry. **She broke down, and that let God break in!**

Can you relate?

Direction, verse 18

“Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”

When you are exhausted, feeling hopeless, and despondent, you need help from outside of yourself. You need another person’s voice to trust and to follow. Hagar was blessed to hear the very voice of Jesus!

That’s exactly Who I need to hear. I need **His** direction, and **His** only. Not the lawyer’s voice, the accountant’s voice, the babysitter’s voice, the bitter woman’s voice, the in-laws’ voices, not even my mother’s voice (and she’s a great one!)! I need Jesus to tell me what to do.

And He will, if I will just be still enough to listen! Psalm 46:10: “Be still, and know that I am God.” Shh! Be still. He has something to say to you. “In returning and rest shall you be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength (Isaiah 30:15). “Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still” (Psalm 4:4). Follow the example of Mary, Lazarus’ sister, who sat at Jesus’ feet so she could listen to Him, even when the dishes needed to be done and the meal served and the guests attended (Luke 10)!

He told Hagar to go to her boy, take him by the hand (so personal and tender), and lift him up. I needed to do that with my own daughter, too. I needed to personally love her so well during this time. She needed my physical touch, my hand lovingly reaching out to her. What does your child need? Maybe your child needs to be “lifted up,” raised physically to their feet again. I know I got knocked to my feet—to my knees!—when I was separated, and I think M got knocked off her feet when she grew older and matured, then looked back at what our family had been through. I needed to lift her up spiritually too, and train her to trust in God, that God would never leave her or forsake her, that she was loved by a large group of caring family, that her dad treasured her too. This knowledge lifted her up just as my physical touch did.

Jesus also gave Hagar a promise: “I will make him into a great nation.” God is so wild, so unpredictable, so wonderfully out-of-the-box! I see His wildness in how He chooses to prosper Ishmael, fatherless, foreign, lost, young, thirsty Ishmael! God loves the fatherless, the young and old, the weak, the widow, the just, the generous. He had a “future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11 again!) for Ishmael, despite family losses in his youth.

We, and our children, have experienced profound losses through family trauma. What have you lost? Like Hagar, your list may be long—but don’t despair! You and your children have a place in God’s plan. He has not forgotten you or turned away from you just because you are in this situation!

Habakkuk, one of God’s Old Testament prophets, expressed his hope this way:

“Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls—yet will I rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Habakkuk 3:17-18). He imagined the loss of all things (for him in agrarian images), yet still hoped in God. He held on to what he knew would never change: God, the One who rescued him. You can have this same hope, too.

Discovery, verse 19

“Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.”

God met Hagar’s needs: direction toward hope and water for herself and her son. These are **both** essentials in my mind; one would not have satisfied without the other. It also teaches us something important about God: He meets our needs, both physical and spiritual. Hagar’s soul and spirit were as thirsty, if not more, than her body. And as any mother would, she wanted hope and water for her son more than for herself.

When my eyes were clouded with tears and sorrow, I needed God and friends to help me see. I could not depend on my own vision at that point; I needed aid. Just as God opened Hagar’s eyes, He opened mine, and **yes**, He can open yours.

He wants you to see what He has for you!

He has growth in store.

He has provision.

He has love for you.

He has confrontation, about anything you need to work on.

He has your future in His hands.

He has peace for you.

He has strength for you.

None of this may look like what you think it should or would. You may look around at the boxes packed up in your house and cry over the thought of moving to a two-bedroom apartment...but remember, God has a plan. You may dislike changing your lifestyle to live more modestly, but remember, God has a plan. God doesn’t value a certain brand name, or a certain neighborhood, or a certain amount of wealth. He just wants it all! He will provide for you, but again, don’t fall into the trap of thinking His provision must come in a pretty or pricey package.

Growth...that can be a code word for pain, no? Before your trouble, you may have been spoiled or arrogant; now you are becoming humble, less self-centered. You may have been cold and hard-hearted; now you are softening, and more tender. That’s growth. But I know; it hurts to grow like this. But why else would they use the expression “growing pains”?

Do you need to ask God to open you eyes so you can see His provision for you? Do it, and see His loving hand taking care of you.

Hagar saw a well, drew out the life-renewing water, and shared that water with her son. I did the same thing with M, and encourage you to do it, too. But I’m not talking about cool, crisp, soothing H-2-O; I’m talking about Living Water, the One

referred to by Jesus in John 7. He says, “ ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this He meant the Spirit, Whom those who believed in Him were later to receive.”

What happened with Hagar is meant to be a picture to us of what can happen at a deeper level. **Physically**, her needs were met; her thirst was quenched, her son was cared for. Now take that personally, and to a spiritual level: your **spiritual** thirst can be quenched by the Holy Spirit, and you can have the privilege of sharing the Living Water with your family and friends.

So how do you get this Living Water?

Believe in Jesus, dear reader. Not just with your head—not mere intellectual assent. Historically, Jesus is more well-documented than Shakespeare, but agreeing with that factual knowledge will not get your soul thirst satisfied. Even the demons believe—and shudder (James 2:19)!

Believe in Jesus as your **Rescuer**. Picture it this way: you are in a courtroom. God is the Judge; Jesus is the lawyer defending you; and Satan is your accuser. The trial starts. Satan stands up, and, taking his time, he unfurls a long list of grievances against you. Everything you’ve done wrong is on the list; everything you should have done and didn’t, everything you did do and shouldn’t have, everything messy, including deep internal things, is on the list. It’s humiliating, listening to all your failings, and you are squirming in your seat. All those bad thoughts were recorded there too! All those selfish motives. All the lust. You look at your defender, Jesus, who listens intently. Your eyes meet; You look hopeless, and He nods, acknowledging your grim situation.

Satan winds up his discourse of damnation, and with a flourish and a pointing finger, looks at you with pleasure and growls, “GUILTY!”

You look at Jesus. You both know it’s true. You have no defense. Jesus approaches the Judge, Who brings down the gavel, pronouncing His just judgment: “Guilty. The sentence is hell.” He writes down the sentence and is handing it to the courtroom aides who will transport you, when you see Jesus move quickly to intercept the paper. “I’ll take her sentence,” He says quietly and firmly. “I will pay the price.” You look at Him, astounded. What? What did He say? Your eyes meet again, and His are so full of love that it takes your breath away. Then He turns and walks out the door. Your Judge solemnly turns to you and says, “Child, you are now able to enter into My Heaven. Come with Me.” Dumb-founded, humbled, and undeserving, you reach out for God, and Your heavenly Father leads you to His home.

This is a word-picture to increase our understanding of Who Jesus is and what He has done. But that’s not the end of the story. You see, before He even came

to earth as part of God's plan, He and the Father and the Spirit were in agreement that mankind needed new hearts. So Jesus promised that when He went back to God the Father (the Ascension), he would send the Holy Spirit to His followers (Pentecost). He saw that we needed His voice within, inside our minds and hearts. His provision for us now is the Holy Spirit, Who is personal, intimate, and inside.

Sometimes people say, "Oh I wish Jesus were here right now! I wish we could just sit down and have lunch and I could tell Him all my problems." Consider what He did for you: He sent the Spirit to you so that while He was gone physically from the earth, you would have His voice still within you! The Holy Spirit speaks what Jesus would say to you, **now!**

Hearing Him (the Spirit) takes some practice. You are not wack-o, listening to "the voices inside your head." You are attending to God Himself made available to you through His Spirit. Here's a test: what He says to you will **always** agree with Scripture. His message will **always** coincide with the two great laws of loving God and loving your neighbor. He will **always** be lifting up God and Jesus. He will develop in you certain traits listed in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The Spirit will convict you of wrong-doing, and never approve of anything that goes against God.

Hagar heard Jesus' voice and found it to be true. She walked to the well, filled up the skin, and helped her son. You too can walk to the Well (the Spirit), fill up, and help your children.

Destiny, verse 20

God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer.

God had plans for Ishmael far beyond Sarah's emotional rejection and anger. God did not leave him; He watched over him and stayed with him. Isn't that encouraging to you? Ishmael gained a life-saving provisionary skill, and had his promised future. That was Hagar's greatest hope. Remember the verses we've already read about Ishmael's destiny:

Genesis 16:10 The angel of the Lord also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude." **11** And the angel of the Lord said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has listened to your affliction. **12** He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen." **13** So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me."

Genesis 17:20 As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation.

Destiny is a mysterious thing: sometimes we don't know we are fulfilling it until we are fulfilling it! God has some clear words about destiny in the Bible. One of my favorites is from Ephesians 2:10: "We are His workmanship, created for good works in Christ Jesus, which He prepared beforehand for us to do." I love knowing that I am God's workmanship, especially created for work He has prepared for me. The Psalmist says, "We are fearfully and wonderfully made." I took Anatomy and Physiology; I considered it a worship class! To see the wonder of God's creation in books, labs, cadavers, and diagrams was nearly overwhelming to me. I couldn't wait to get to class!

Each person is specifically equipped and gifted with what is necessary to fulfill God's destiny for their lives. What do I mean by gifts? The way we think and perceive; the abilities we are given; the strengths and weaknesses we develop over our lifetimes. These, combined with our experiences and genetics, make us who we are.

You and I are molded by this experience of divorce or separation, dear reader. It's traumatic, frustrating, maddening, enlightening, humbling...the list can go on and on. **But trust God in this: He will use it to bring about your destiny.** You have not destroyed yourself! God is not finished with you or this situation; have hope, take courage. He knows the big picture of your destiny, and the future of your family. Hang onto Him, cry out to Him, and stay close to Him. To those who love Him, He has great promises:

Romans 8:28

And we know that **for those who love God, all things work together for good**, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Is 61:3 [Jesus will come to] provide for those who grieve in Zion [or Knoxville, or wherever His people are!]- to bestow on them a crown of **beauty** instead of **ashes**, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now **no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**.

With those verses in mind, go embrace your God and His destiny for you! Will it be reconciliation? Will it be a new career? Will it be a new place to live? Will it be your former marriage, made new through His love? I can only hope for you, dear reader and friend, that you will stay close to God and journey with Him through this valley. Beautiful mountain-tops are in the distance. Don't be afraid; start walking toward them. I hope to meet you on the road.

God's peace to you,
Suz